1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL

THE Vedda country at the present day is limited to a roughly triangular tract lying between the eastern slopes of the central mountain *massif* and the sea. This area of about 2400 square miles is bounded on the west by the Mahaweli Ganga, from the point where, abandoning its eastern course through the mountains of the Central Province, the river sweeps northwards to the sea. A line from this great bend passing eastwards through Bibile village (on the Badulla-Batticaloa road) to the coast will define the southern limits of the Vedda country with sufficient accuracy, while its eastern limit is the coast. So defined it includes the greater part of the Eastern Province, about a fifth of Uva and a small portion of that part of the North Central Province known as Tamankaduwa, and is traversed by a single high road capable of taking wheeled traffic. This runs from Badulla, the capital of Uva, lying at the foot of the central mountain mass of the island, to the coast a few miles to the north of Batticaloa, the capital of the Eastern Province.

Excepting only the mountain scenery of Upper Uva and the Central Province, the Vedda country even in its present diminished form presents every variety of scenery met with in Ceylon, including alike the magnificent Uva park lands and the sandy mangrove-fringed flats of the Eastern coast. Within its borders is situated Mahayangana (Alutnuwara) the ancient assembling place of the Yakkas where, according to the Mahawansa, Buddha appeared and struck terror into their hearts before propounding his doctrines to the hosts of *devas* who

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

133

Fig. 1. View from the P. W. D. bungalow at Nilgala

Fig. 2. The Gal Oya river near Nilgala

[facing p. 2]

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

133 attended him there. Here was erected the Mahayangana dagaba, the oldest in Ceylon, built over the relics of the very Buddha and from its inception to the present day the goal of countless generations of pious pilgrims reaching it by descending the Gallepadahulla, the pass of two thousand steps, that leads in less than an hour from the breezy uplands of the Central Province to the steamy river valley two thousand feet below. It is from this, the old pilgrim path, wending its way above the pass through the pleasant hills of Uva from the forgotten city of Medamahanuwara, that the best idea of the Vedda country is obtained. A sudden rise in the ground gives the first view of the Vedda country through a V-shaped frame of hills, and from such a spot as this Knox must have looked upon Bintenne. "It (the country of Bintan) seems to be a smooth land and not much hilly, the great river running through the midst of it. It is all over covered with mighty woods and abundance of deer, but much subject to dry weather and sickness. In these woods is a sort of wild people inhabiting, whom we shall speak of in their place[1]."

Continuing along the path a little further, a wider view is obtained where the track seems to end abruptly in a great rock, the Ballangala or look-out rock, upon which the pilgrim halts to gaze reverently upon the ancient dagaba and the flat land spread out before him.

Here flows the Mahaweli ganga, soon to be hidden in the great sea of forest-clad lowland stretching away to the north, from which rise Kokagalla and other hills, the traditional homes of the Veddas, like rocky islands in the distance. To the east tower the Uva Mountains, stretching onwards in a diminishing series towards the uplands of Nilgala. In Bintenne, including in this term parts of both Uva and the Eastern Province, the jungle consists of a forest of great trees without much undergrowth, occasionally interrupted by open spaces, covered with coarse grass, which, however, does not grow much higher than the knee. These open patches are more numerous in the Eastern Province than they are in Uva Bintenne (which is traversed by

[1] *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon in the East Indies*, London, 1681. Chapter II, p. 3.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

many small streams) and it is generally supposed that they are the sites of ancient cultivation; there are comparatively few streams in this country though swamps and small water holes containing stagnant water are common[1]. 133

Northward in Tamankaduwa (a division of the North Central Province) the great trees give place to poorer growth and a scrubby jungle is found. On the east of the Badulla-Batticaloa road lie the Nilgala hills, the best of the Vedda domain and the most pleasing country in Ceylon. Here, broad valleys lie between jungle-clad ranges of much weathered gneiss, among whose rocky crags and rounded domes, *bambaru*, the rock bee (*Apis indica*), builds its combs. Here is no gloomy jungle, but in the valleys are many thickets and small trees growing scattered as in a young orchard, their trunks protected by coarse lalang grass which often attains 5 or 6 feet in 133 137

[1] The character of the Bintenne of the Eastern Province has been well stated by Mr H. Freeman, Government Agent for the Eastern Province, in his Administration Report for 1908, for the following extract from which I am indebted to Mr John Ferguson: "This is an unsatisfactory region; a wretched population of about 3,000 in the largest patu of the Province has, with the exception of three or four small patches of paddy land, nothing to live on except chenas and jungle produce; they have not the advantage of the hundreds along the coast who can get a sort of living by begging from their neighbours. Necessarily the Bintenna folk are miserable in appearance; nearly all of them are sick. There are many abandoned tanks, but the people have neither the physique nor the will to restore them. There are no coconuts to speak of in Bintenna; the few trees are either infertile or barren. Still we must take the people and the country as we find them, and rather than let the population drift away from Bintenna to the chena country of Uva, I would concentrate them on the more fertile spots about Kallodai, Maha-oya, Pullumalai and Tempitiya, on or near the Badulla road, and endeavour to teach them to do tank work; there are promising, abandoned, tanks, which could be restored, and the land settled on the people on easy terms. Plentiful chenas would be necessary to fill the stomachs of the people to get work out of them; maize grows well in Bintenna; it is now imported in large quantities from Uva; large tracts of Bintenna could be turned into maize fields for the supply of the people on the coast also, while Uva could then keep to itself its supplies of this commodity sent down to this district....In addition to the Sinhalese population of Bintenna there are the Veddas,...and bands of gipsies find a good hunting ground there. Some of these have just been prosecuted and imprisoned for violating the Game Laws, and also made to pay road tax, payment of which they have evaded for years; the gipsies have considerable wealth in cattle and other property; they also drink and steal. Since writing the above on the condition of Bintenna I have explored other and remoter parts of that division, and find that whatever prosperity in paddy cultivation it enjoyed in the distant past must have been due to the Rajakariya system, in the absence of which Bintenna will probably remain a wilderness for an indefinitely long period."

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

133 137 height. Clear rock-strewn streams abound, their banks brightened by the deep green leaves and the bright red flowers of the *ratmal* (*Ixora coccinea*). Scattered masses of rock often of great size form convenient shelters for the Veddas, and assist the rapid drainage of the country, which does not become water-logged even during torrential rains. This beautiful country is rich in game. To the east, where many Veddas have drifted, the jungle is thicker, the land lies lower, and is generally less healthy. The Nuwaragala Hills to the north of the Nilgala ranges are perhaps the wildest part of the island and are more densely clothed in jungle, but there are plenty of streams, while the slope of the country permits of ready drainage.

The coastal zone north of Batticaloa inhabited by the coast Veddas is flat and sandy, and the vegetation though dense is often less tall and less abundant than in other parts of the country. Salt water marshes are common, and the country is cut into by numerous lagoons and creeks, often bounded by a fringe of mangroves which stretches some distance up the mouths of the rivers. Although this area may now, and 131 for yet a few years, be rightly called the Vedda country it must 161 not be thought that any considerable number of its inhabitants 563 are Veddas, or that they exercise any territorial or political influence; on the contrary, they constitute an insignificant fraction of the Tamil and Sinhalese inhabitants before whom they are rapidly disappearing, partly by intermarriage and absorption, partly owing to misery and a high death rate brought about by sheer inability to cope with the new state of affairs that the increased settlement of this, the wildest part of the island, has brought about.

131 175 Formerly the Vedda country is known to have embraced the whole of the Uva, and much of the Central and North Central Provinces, while there is no reason to suppose that their territory did not extend beyond these limits. Indeed there is no reasonable doubt that the Veddas are identical with the "Yakkas" of the Mahavansa and other native chronicles.

175 The seventh chapter of the Mahawansa relates the arrival in Ceylon, B.C. 543, of Vijaya who married Kuweni an aboriginal princess (*Yakkini*) and by her assistance destroyed a great

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

342
133

Fig. 1. Rough shelter on the Danigala rock dome

142
516

Fig. 2. Veddas of Bandarawela

[facing p. 38]

4:Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

NOTES ON ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE IN THE VEDDA COUNTRY.

By FREDERICK LEWIS, F.L.S.

(With one map.)

THE locality to which these notes apply represents the whole of the Maha Wedirata, the eastern half of the Buttala-Wedirata, and the southern half of the Panawa Pattu of the Eastern Province. 131

This large extent of country falls within part of Uva from the Monaragala range eastwards, and, as indicated above, part of the Eastern Province, or more specifically within the following rough boundaries. Starting from the conspicuous needle-pointed mountain called Wadinagala on the north, it follows the provincial limits of the Eastern Province to the point where it crosses the Government cart road from Potuvil to Muppane. From that point the road to Muppane is adopted as far at Potuvil, from thence following the sea-coast to Kumuna on the banks of the Kumbukkan river.

Next the Kumbukkan river is followed to a point called Kobilitte, at the foot of the imposing mass of rock shown on the Admiralty charts as "Chimney Hill." From here, a line drawn to Sirigala and thence to Wadinagala encloses the whole.

Within this area there is only one perennial river—the Kumbukkan-aar, which forms the southern limit of the region in question. The next largest stream is the Heda-oya, which in the north-east monsoon is a wide and formidable river. To the north the Lankiya-oya is an important stream, which is supplemented by several considerable branches that after uniting with it form a great branch of the Namal-oya. 133

The Govindu-oya, rising on the east flank of the "Westminster Abbey," forms a useful branch of the Karandi-oya that drains the eastern half of the Maha Wedirata country.

4: Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

133 while the Wila-oya and Kulapan-oya convey the waters from the eastern limits of the Buttala-Wedirata to the sea through the Panawa Pattu.

The chief mountains are Wadinagala (2,414 ft.), "Westminster Abbey" (1,830 ft.), Degalhella, Nilgala, Hibitalanagala, Kiripokunagala, "Chimney Hill," and Obbekota in the Monaragala range.

Most of these mountains rise abruptly from the plains below, and terminate in high masses of rock. There are, in some cases—particularly on the summit of "Westminster Abbey"—small patches of vegetation, but in the majority the summits of the more conspicuous hills are bare. The country described, therefore, may, broadly speaking, be considered as flat, broken by a few low undulations, the whole being dotted over irregularly with abrupt mountainous masses of rock.

132 The rainfall of this area is comparatively low, and probably does not exceed an average of 60 inches for the year, nearly the whole of which falls in the north-east monsoon, thus involving a period of extreme drought during the south-west monsoon, when for months there is not a drop of rain, followed by torrential showers of variable intensity and uneven distribution.

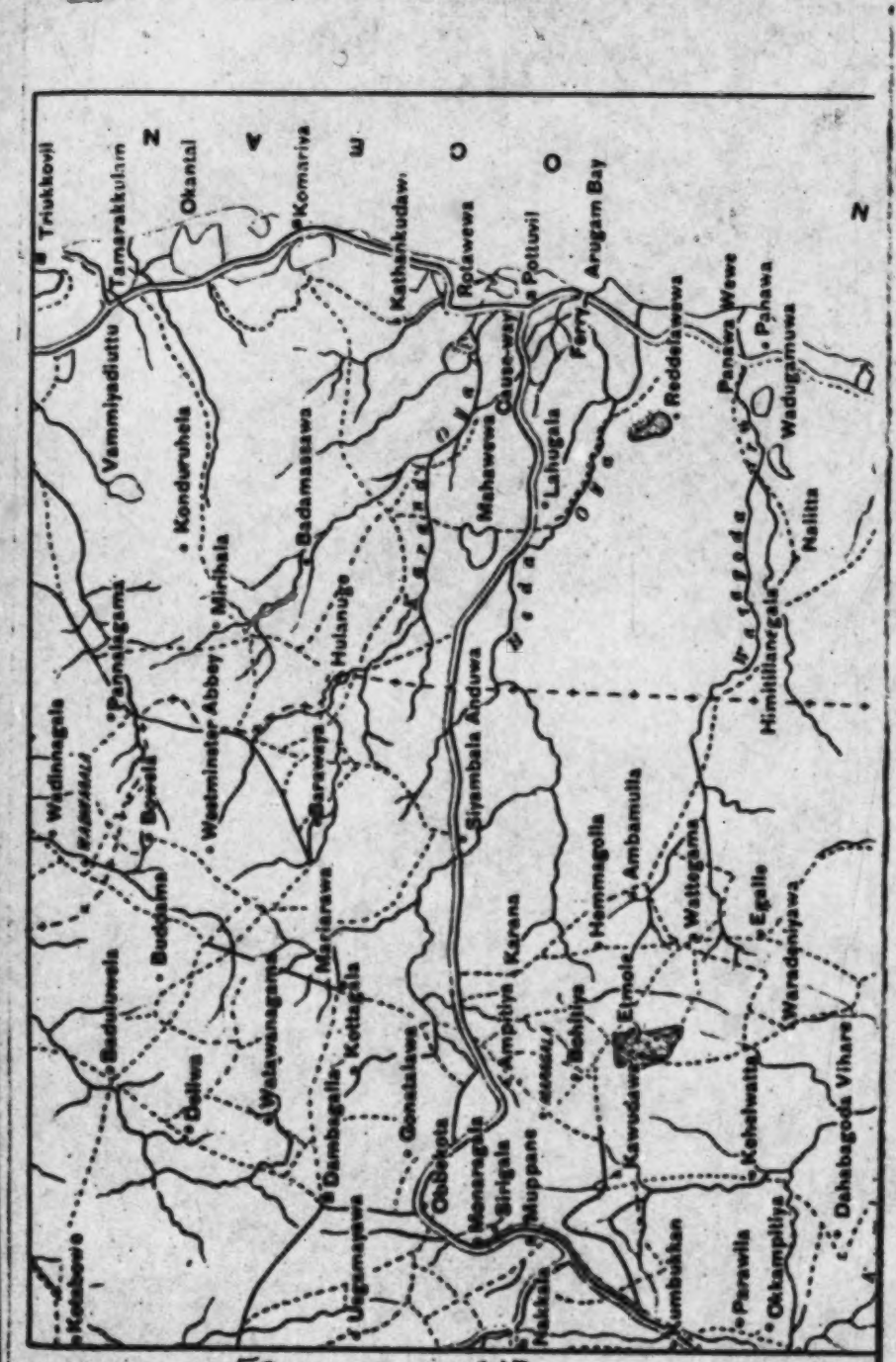
I am indebted to Mr. Balfour, the Director of Irrigation, for the details of rainfall at Ampari and Rotawewa,* well outside the area I refer to, and to the Surveyor-General† for the same particulars at Monaragala, these being given in tabular form in the Appendix.

137 As might be anticipated from such variation and extreme, it would follow that the vegetation of the country embraced must be, for the most part, what is called dry-zone flora, but other influences have to be considered in relation to distribution. These may be considered as being affected—

(*a*) By influence of streams rising in high altitudes, or in moister regions;
(*b*) By the operations of human beings;
(*c*) By animal transport of seed;
(*d*) By wind action.

* Appendix A. † Appendix B.

4:Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5



102
133
361

102
133
361

4:Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

[Facing p. 164 (B)]

The Vedda Country.

342
516

Of no consequence except to each other (Page 5)

133

Gunner's Quoin across Manampitiya tank. (Page 7)

[Facing p. 3]

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

away more frightened than you. A scratching noise under your pillow may lead to the discovery of a scorpion or a centipede. Beetles, moths, biting ants, and insects of all descriptions investigate and experiment with you. But you soon learn to ignore these little draw-backs and drowse to the lullaby of some wood-land songster.

Tropical Nature is a stern mistress; her favours are never unalloyed. For him who would seek her she holds grievances in store, grievances that enhance the very joy they encumber; toning down ecstasy lest it pall with surfeit; giving to the contemplation of foregone experience that unfettered pleasure the reality denies, prompting us in after years to say, forgetful of all the hardships, "those were happy days we had".

The Verugal where it joined the Mahaweli was at this season an insignificant stream. Quite a colony of tobacco growers flourished here. Very picturesque are these settlements or *thethes* as they are called. Four to six huts stand some distance apart in clearings along the bank, most of them beautifully overspread with melon-creepers. Every hut has its vegetable garden; and standing before them, like sentinels, are the draw-wells, usually in couples, that feed the tobacco plots direct from the river. The lowing of cattle under the superb trees that stud the clearing, the crowing of cocks, the sound of human voices complete the atmosphere of rural domesticity in this wild land and furnish scenes which would rejoice the heart of a painter.

Putting up one evening in a coconut grove owned by a Moor we found an unkempt ill-clad fellow seated on his haunches staring at some simple wares a pedlar was displaying. They told us he was a Vedda from a village some miles away. Becoming restless under our scrutiny he walked off. I followed him to his miserable shelter, where I found his daughter, a puny girl of four, covered with ulcers. Edging up towards her father she stared at us distrustfully with the eyes of a startled doe. A few broken pots were their sole belongings. The bond of tender solicitude that united these human derelicts, of no consequence except to each other, was indeed a touching sight. I asked the man what he did for a living. He said he "earned a rupee for two months work". He knew neither his nor his daughter's age, and when pressed for an answer said irritably, "What do I know of age? Am I a man who knows anything about age?" Blessed mortal!

We gave him a coin which he at first refused, and only accepted with persuasion; he had evidently never handled one like it before, for he looked at it puzzled and suspicious; and when the amount it represented was explained to him he was not enlightened.

"He knows nothing," said the Moor vociferously. "Ask him to count six and see if he can. He's a real bull. What does he know? He's a Vedda. For thirty-six cents he will bring a kerosene-tinful of *bambara** honey, and," he added chuckling with subtle satisfaction, "he does not know what thirty-six cents is!"

The next day we saw in the distance the blue contours of Gunner's Quoin, the goal of our journey. The river had now become considerably shallower with broad stretches of its sandy bed exposed. As we punted along the shady border, we suddenly came upon a most realistic piece of ancient sculpture—the life-sized head of an elephant carved out of a

*Rock-bee, *Apis dorsata*

3. YAKKURE

This be the verse you grave for me;
Here he lies where belonged to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

R. L. STEVENSON

THROUGH a lush meadow studded with fragrant wood-apple, we entered Kalukolu Eba a hamlet of some twenty huts nestling in the picturesque dishabille of a *chena* rank with maize, vegetables and chillies. Here as elsewhere in the Vanni there was much evidence of parangi (framboesia). Fully three-fourths of the people showed active or quiescent traces of the disease. A boy had a necklace of loathsome papules; a woman covered with nodes in practically every bone of her body was boiling a decoction of dry leaves as a salve; another was stewing monitor flesh in chilli-water.

The first sign of our nearness to Yakkure was a cattle-pen stamped clean, where half a dozen boys were securing cows and yearlings for the night. Scratching around the stockade with the tameness of domestic fowls were a jungle cock and his dames, and from every side came the jerky cries of wild chanticleers. A cairn of tumbled stones marked the site of an old *vihare*. Blue in the distance, across a wide lagoon bordered with sedge, lotus and dead trees, stood the long rock called Gunner's Quoin, with a bare patch, high on its tree-mantled flank, pointed out to us as the Maraweethiya, a historic cave.

Yakkure itself was a negligently palisaded hamlet nestling ina grove of tamarinds, in full view of a beautiful tank. We were unfortunate in our choice of a camping place. Five days of seclusion in the forest had made us forget that the immediate proximity to a village always meant flies, smells, and embarrassing attentions from forward men and coy but curious women. There were other draw-backs too. At sunset, from a pool near by, came a low, ominous hum auguring ill for our night's rest. We lit fires, bestowed meticulous care on bed curtains, and bedaubed ourselves with mosquitol. The lapwing's desolate cry, the doleful music of water fowl, the booming of great owls, the distant trumpeting of elephants, and more than all, the baffled mosquito murmur around, soon lulled me to sleep. But my companion who had failed to stop up betimes several holes in his curtain, the inside of which was found at dawn to be plastered with a blood-sodden host, tells a different story!

Three miles from Yakkure are the well-known falls of the Mahaweli. At flood-time their thunder is heard at the village. Once in a decade the waters reep up to and submerge the huts, sending the people up trees, and their cattle into the forest to be drowned or killed by leopards. With a *kapua* (priest) for guide, for the place is held eerie, we set out to visit the falls. Skirting an ancient aqueduct (*yoda ella*) which tapped the river a mile above the falls, we came to open jungle bordering the banks, that allowed us free passage through its colonnades of giant

[P. 39]

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

133

Dastota falls. (Page 39)

291
412
415

Sinna, a Vedda of Gunner's Quoin. (Page 42)

[Facing p. 39]

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

timber. Such places are the favourite resort of sambur, of which on this morning we saw no less than six. From great tree-heights came the whirring of strong wings as gibbous-beaked hornbills took alarm. We were perhaps a half-mile from the falls when we first heard them like a pervasive hum of swarming bees. Soon we lost the noise; and turning to our guide for an explanation, learnt, inconsequently enough, that "the water does not cry after the morning; it cries loudest when the cock crows at dawn!" The sound swelled suddenly again as there opened before us, not the turbulent cascade we expected, but placid murmuring rapids that swirled in a wide sheet around and over a thousand sunnied boulders. Such were the falls as we saw them; but on occasion they could be a roaring power leaping over the granite to a wild cataract melody, surging widely to the outskirts of Yakkure itself, and bestrewing the jungle with great wrack that even now lay stranded high on forked tree-trunks. What wonder the place is held in awe and that men have a care how they journey to it, lest they be lost on the way or fall a prey to beast or demon.

A smooth rock on the bank bore the frettings of ancient craft; the tutelary god's *devale* (temple) it was said to be. Here we were irreverently seated, while our guides sat apart whispering at the profanation. The surface of the rock was socketed presumably to hold strong stanchions which in the old days supported a bridge across the water; while small oval pools, reputed to contain a mint of wealth from the accumulation of years of propitiatory and votive offerings, showed to our pagan vision nothing more than a few potato-like pebbles and sportive water beetles.

A few months before our visit, Yakkure was the setting of a gallant episode:—On the bund of the Polonnaruwa tank stands a shanty for forest-officers on circuit. Here one evening a wiry man of forty-five was amusing himself with his rifle. Placing a rupee against a tree fifty yards away he fired, holing it in the centre. He next made his targets a variety of live things that flecked the smooth surface of the tank, such as a cormorant or the barely visible head of a submerged crocodile. Every time his aim was true. The shots attracted a friend. "Testing your nerves as usual before an adventure?" he asked, walking up. "What is it this time? The Yakkure rogue* I'll bet."

"Yes, to-morrow I hope to get him," was the confident response. "You haven't seen *this* before, have you?" said the hunter handling his new rifle.

"You know best," said his friend; "but I should have brought a tried weapon if I were you, especially against such a beast as the Yakkure rogue is said to be. Only yesterday he smashed a boy to pulp. The villagers are too scared to leave their homes."

"This gun is all right. I've tested it. See," said he, indicating his hits, "I've been warned time and again against the use of light arms for elephants, but they have never failed me so far. Once, though," he continued thoughtfully "I had a near shave..... You know, I sometimes wonder whether the villagers appreciate what I do for them."

"They look on you as their greatest benefactor," replied his friend.

"It is good to know that," said the hunter. "For the last fifteen years, whenever I heard of a rogue in my province, I've gone after him; often at great trouble and expense."

*A dangerous elephant ostracised by the herd, and a menace to human life and property.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

CHAPTER V

WESTMINSTER ABBEY AND FRIAR'S HOOD

1. WESTMINSTER ABBEY

I know not where the white road runs,
nor what the blue hills are,
But a man can have a sun for friend,
and for his guide a star;
And there's no end of voyaging when once
the voice is heard,
For the river calls and the road calls, and oh!
the call of a bird.

GERALD GOULD

133 FROM some dominant height in the central uplands of Ceylon one can survey, to east and south, a vast sea of hill-studded forest. The scene, when glowing with the hues of evening, might well take its place among the panoramas of the world. In this medley of mountains there is one, a long ridge rising at one end to a square tower, which seldom fails to arrest the fancy. Westminster Abbey it is called by those who view it from afar, Govinda Hela by those with closer acquaintance of it. Well to the north of this is a peak, tall and lonely, known as Friar's Hood —the *Capello de Frade* of the old Portuguese mariners to whom it was a land-mark by which to evade their mortal foes the Dutch, "the rebels from Europe" as their despatches called them. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*, says Tacitus; but does near knowledge always rob reality of romance? We shall see.

176 The inhabitants of Siyambala Anduwa, half way between Muppane and Pottuvil, are a simple folk ingrained with jungle superstition: That river beneath the bridge was haunted by demons; it was not safe to go there alone at night, or to bathe there by noon especially with scented soap, for this attracted devils who showed their displeasure by hammering on the bridge or throwing sand; a small boy digging in the river-bed was swallowed into the earth and rescued only to die of a fever a few days later. Apparitions were seen in the form of dwarfs who shot up to the proportions of trees and suddenly disappeared, striking the beholder with terror. As for children you could not bring up "those things" in these parts. The *gawara* was a buffalo-like beast possessed of a tongue so horny that when it licked man or animal the flesh dissolved away leaving only the bones. The *Nittaewo* were a pigmy race, that lived at one time in the Kattragam country of Lenama not far away. These hairy cannibals attacked in companies, driving their long nails into the

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

ladders prepared for us beforehand, we made the laborious ascent; finally shinning up the interlacing roots of an obliging banyan tree that gripped a great hump of rock, we attained the summit of the northern bastion. Here we found the usual signs of old-world occupation: cisterns and seats cut out of the living rock, fragments of brick and pottery, and strong stone walls overrun with scrub and pine-apple.

The height was desolate but for wild cats, and songless but for the boom of wanderoo far below. A ceaseless drizzle blanketed in mist the superb view of forest and hill we commanded; but every now and then the mist lifted and showed the graceful contours of the ranges. There, crouching like a headless beast, its neck indrawn, was magnificent Wadinagala; to the south was the long straight ridge of Moneragala; and close at hand were the twin domes named by the Veddas *Thanagoda* (breast mounds) and behind them *Thanakirigoda* (breast milk mound) with wracks of milky mist caressing their summits.

On our descent we were better able to discern certain features of the rock the rain had so far hidden from us. Out of long horizontal fissures high on the perpendicular face of the hill, projected numerous sticks driven in for foot-hold by honey-gatherers; and dangling from the summit was a long cane that had once borne a daring fellow within reach of seemingly unassailable hives. Here we heard a marvellous tale: A Vedda of Bowala once saw a heap of wax that had accumulated on a ledge which an overhanging brow of rock made inaccessible. Nothing daunted, he armed himself with a torch and sambur-horn, descended by just such a cane as we now saw, and swung himself to and fro within reach of the wax, heating it with the torch each time he approached it. When he thought the mass sufficiently molten he stuck the horn deep into it and waited till it set. Then swinging himself once more towards it and seizing hold of the embedded horn, he leaped on to the ledge collected the wax, and swung off again. He did this year by year. On the last occasion, the horn not being sufficiently secure, the poor fellow was dashed to death among the trees and stones below. His wife who had witnessed the tragedy carried back word, "*Meena kalangkal-angme popekorai*," which being onomatopoeic hardly requires rendering.

Our departure from Bowala was ceremonial. On the path stood a drummer, with two boyish figures disguised from head to foot in dry plantain leaves, that were plaited into tails behind. Their faces were hidden by speckled masks made from fragments of gourd-rind, with slits for eyes and mouth, and a blob of resin with fibres attached for nose and beard. Their bare feet and hands were the only indications that these scare-crows were in reality human beings.

The drummer struck; the dance began. The time twelve noon. The floor a root-ridden path bestrewn with elephant droppings and intercepted by beflowered streams. The walls, bordering forest trees festooned with great lianas on which parrots chattered. The dazzling sky above. For orchestra, the staccato rhythm of the drum, the jangling bells that studded the deerskin greaves of the dancers, the sound of a falling branch perhaps, or the short, sharp clamorous outburst of chirping cicalas. For a mile or more the performers led the way with a swaying two-step dance, hopping circularly on one leg to let us catch up did they outdistance us. At the next village the drummer wore the greaves, and

λ [the hill called Westminster Abbey. – Analyst]

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5
Sinhalese AX4

CHAPTER VII

BINTENNE

THE pass at Kadugannawa was thronged with bartering humanity. Being Sunday, it was market day, and the occasion served well to help us lay in a good stock of tobacco and betel, the best passport to the wild interior.

On through Teldeniya, whose cocoa plantations teem with snails that straggle over the road to explode under our car-wheels, and then, after Urugalla, we climb the Nugatenne gap and, skirting the Dumbara valley, attain beautiful wind-swept Madugoda. So far among the hills. From here it is a sudden drop to the Mahaweli and the wilderness beyond. We have left Madugoda but a little way when, at a turn, there suddenly opens before us a magic sea of misty greenery broken by hill ranges; there stand many blue mountains we know, Kokagalla, the dancing rock of the Veddas, and Friar's Hood faint and far; and there gleam a river and a tank; the former the Mahaweli, the latter placid Horabora Wewa traditional lake of Vedda lands.

The descent from the hills here is perhaps the most precipitous in all Ceylon; we drop some two thousand feet, and negotiate eighteen elbow bends within four miles; then, skirting the base of the mountain we come to the ferry of Weragantota and cross the Mahaweli in canoes to Alutnuwara, a fever-stricken place; whoever sojourns here even a few days invariably pays the penalty.

A quaint old town is Alutnuwara, or Bintenne as the jungle dwellers call it. Cosy homes and boutiques nestle under shady trees. Chained monkeys and caged parrots are ubiquitous and may be purchased for a song. Laden *tavalam* teams rest here on their way to the interior. It being April, every tree has its nesting bird—bee-catchers, bulbuls, drongos, coppersmiths and all the rest of them; hungry little squirrels cheep spasmodically for food; song fills the air.

Scattered about the place one is surprised to find old cannon. Those who see them for the first time frame visions of an era when ancient Sinhalese kings built these in foundries, and fed them with powder made from sulphur and nitre available in the neighbouring hills. But we may safely assume that firearms were unknown in Ceylon prior to the coming of the Portuguese. What then is the story of these brave things that lie in a ditch here, set off a doorway there? They were brought here, according to some, from the East coast by the English in their attempts to take Kandy; but finding the mountain barrier impassable they abandoned them here. The more likely explanation, however, is that they are a survival of the time when Alutnuwara was a military station after the Kandyan rebellion of 1817, "the last great occasion on which the English forces were arrayed in hostility against the natives of any portion of Ceylon."* To prevent a repetition of rebellion, a

*Emerson Tennent.

[p. 91]